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ABSTRACT

In light of the fact that students at risk of dropping out of school have become the focus of national attention, this paper examines one alternative program designed to work with a population considered to be at very high risk for dropping out. The population served by the School-Community Guidance Center (SCGC) in the Austin (Texas) Independent School District is described as consisting of those students who present with poor attendance patterns, minimal skills, problems with behavior, and some contact with juvenile court authorities. This paper is divided into five segments. The first part looks at the nature of Rice Secondary School which houses the School-Community Guidance Center. The second part looks at services provided by SCGC in 1987-88. The characteristics of the SCGC are the focus of the third section. In the fourth part, the focus is on what happened to students when they left the SCGC. The last section presents results of a dropout study of former Rice students. (ABL)

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HIGH-RISK STUDENTS--CAN YOU KEEP THEM IN SCHOOL?

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Office of Research and Evaluation

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HIGH-RISK STUDENTS--CAN YOU KEEP THEM IN SCHOOL?

INTRODUCTION

Students at risk of dropping out of school have increasingly become the focus of national attention. This paper looks at one alternative program designed to work with a population considered at very high risk for dropping out. The students have been unsuccessful at fitting into a regular school environment and have already been labeled incorrigible for most part.

Last year 46% of the students had not passed any part of the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS) and therefore were lacking in minimum skills. At least one-fourth (23%) by self-report had had contact with juvenile authorities. There was an increase last year in students referred for excessive/unexcused absences, assault, possession of weapons, and fighting. Overall, the students present with poor attendance patterns, minimal skills, problems with behavior, and some contact with juvenile court authorities.

The staff at this alternative school attempt to help these students: increase school attendance, improve academic achievement, decrease disruptive behavior, and reduce contacts with the court authorities.

This paper is divided into five segments. The first part looks at the nature of Rice Secondary School which houses the School-Community Guidance Center (SCGC). The second part looks at services provided by SCGC in 1987-88. The characteristics of the SCGC students are the focus of the third section. In the fourth part, the focus is on what happened to students whey they left SCGC. The last section presents results of a dropout study of former Rice students.

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY GUIDANCE CENTER

The School-Community Guidance Center (SCGC) in the Austin Independent School District (AISD) during 1987-88 employed three project specialists who served as liaisons between AISD, the juvenile justice system, various community service agencies, and at-risk students. The term "at-risk" referred to young people who fell into one or more of the following categories:

- Engaged in delinquent conduct,
- Functioned unacceptably in school, and
- Adjudicated.

Adjudication included those who merely had contact with juvenile justice authorities as well as young people actually arrested and detained. All of these were judged to be likely to drop out of school if they had not dropped out already.

Two project specialists were assigned to F.R. Rice Secondary School, one at the high school campus and one at the middle school campus. At Rice, all students and their parents or guardians met with the project specialists and enrolled simultaneously in the school **and** SCGC.

One project specialist was assigned to Gardner House, the Travis County Juvenile Detention Center which houses juveniles, detained by the police, who are awaiting a court hearing. She primarily provided educational services to students. Six part-time staff were also assigned to summer school for attendance follow-ups and counseling duties. This paper will focus on the F.R. Rice Secondary School and the SCGC program.

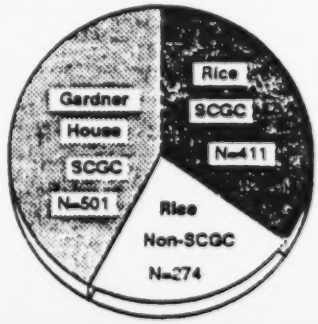
In addition to liaison and referral services, the project specialists also offered counseling, tutoring, and monitoring. The objectives of the SCGC program focused on these four goals:

- Increased school attendance,
- Improved academic achievement,
- Decreased disruptive behaviors, and
- Reduced contacts with court authorities.

In order to better understand the SCGC program, it is necessary to understand the nature of Rice, which provides the context for the operation of SCGC. The context is important as it acts as a constraint on the SCGC program.

The majority of the students enrolled at Rice were served by SCGC.

Rice and Gardner House Students



WHAT IS THE NATURE OF RICE SECONDARY SCHOOL?

A description of Rice is essential to understanding the role of SCGC staff, as most of these students were actually served by the program. AISD operates F.R. Rice as an alternative school for secondary students removed from their home schools due to incorrigible conduct. In 1987-88, two campuses operated -- Rice High School (for grades 9-12) and Rice Middle School (for grade 6-8).

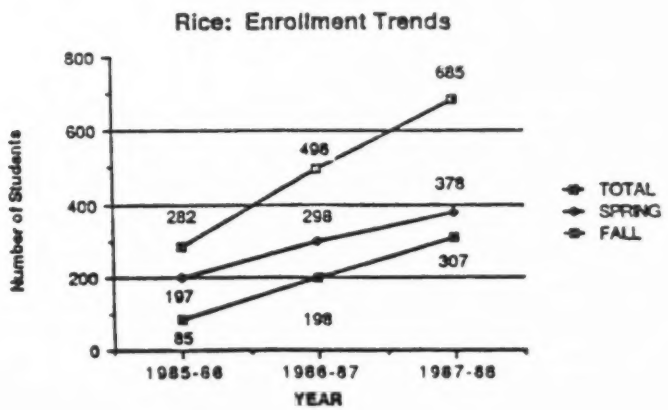
ENROLLMENT TRENDS

The total number enrolled has been increasing each year as shown in Figure 1. The total of 685 students who were enrolled at any time during the 1987-88 school year was 38.1% higher than the year before and 142.9% higher than two years ago. Enrollment at Rice increases during each semester as more students are referred.

FIGURE 1
Enrollment at F.R. Rice

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Fall	85	198	307
Spring	197	298	378
Total	282	496	685

	1987-88	
	Rice High School	Rice Middle School
Fall	139	168
Spring	179	199
Total	318	367



STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Grade Levels and Ages - Rice Middle School (Rice M.S.) was designated for grade 6-8 and accommodated students in those grades. Rice High School (Rice H.S.), while designated for grades 9-12, actually had students from grades 7-12. The ages of the students on the two campuses overlapped. Rice M.S. students were ages 11 to 17 and Rice H.S. students were ages 13 to 19, with 15 the most common age at both campuses. See Figure 2.

FIGURE 2
Grades and Ages of Students

Grades	Rice H.S.	Rice M.S.
6		43 (11.7%)
7	10 (3.1%)	147 (40.1%)
8	87 (27.4%)	177 (48.2%)
9	147 (46.2%)	
10	43 (13.5%)	
11	21 (6.6%)	
12	10 (3.1%)	

Ages	Rice H.S.	Rice M.S.
11		1 (0.3%)
12		28 (7.6%)
13	3 (0.9%)	81 (22.1%)
14	30 (9.4%)	111 (30.2%)
15	109 (34.3%)	109 (29.7%)
16	104 (32.7%)	31 (8.4%)
17	47 (14.8%)	6 (1.6%)
18	22 (6.9%)	
19	3 (0.9%)	
Median	15.6	14.1

Repeaters - During 1987-88, 565 (82.4%) of the students at Rice were enrolled for the first time while 120 (17.6%) were repeaters who had attended in previous semesters.

Contact with Juvenile Authorities - More of the Rice M. S. students (87 or 23.8%) reported contact with juvenile authorities than Rice H.S. students (46 or 14.5%). The numbers, obtained from student's self-report, are probably an underestimate of the actual number of students who had contact with juvenile authorities.

Special Education - Special education students were equally represented at the two campuses with a total of 77 (11.2%) of all enrolled.

Gender - Students tended to be male more often than female at Rice H.S., (220 or 69.2%) and Rice M.S. (270 or 73.6%).

Ethnicity - Students at Rice H.S. were most often Black, (148 or 46.5%), while students at Rice M. S. were most often Hispanic, (196 or 53.4%).

See Attachment 1, page 1 for further detailed information.

REFERRAL REASONS AND SCHOOLS

Of the 685 students enrolled, 529 (77.2%), were referred predominantly for behavior problems. However, students were also referred for the Academic Incentive Program (AIP), the Transitional Academic Program (TAP), and as a special assignment. AIP and TAP are academic programs for retainees and potential retainees at the middle school grades.

	Total	Rice H.S.	Rice M.S.
AIP	14	11	3
Behavior	529	234	295
TAP	118	55	63
Special Assignment	24	18	6

Rice H.S. students were most likely to be referred for truancy and unexcused absences. Rice M.S. students were most likely to be referred for fighting and insubordination. See Attachment 1, page 2 for further details.

The students enrolled at Rice this year presented more severe behavior problems. Large increases were seen in the more serious acting-out behaviors and avoidance/withdrawal behaviors. Although the population at Rice increased by 38.1%, students referred for some offenses increased far more than would be expected as shown in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3
Offense Increases

OFFENSE	1986-87	1987-88	Increase
Unexcused/Excessive Absences	89	201	225.0%
Assault	34	74	217.6%
Missed or Excessive Detention	46	93	202.0%
Possession of Weapons	14	25	178.6%
Fighting	122	191	56.5%
Profanity	67	103	53.0%

Few offenses decreased in referral rates. Referrals for gambling dropped from three to zero and violation of drug policy decreased from 62 (7.7%) to 56 (4.7%). Referrals for insubordination increased by only 5%.

Students were referred to Rice H. S. and Rice M. S. from all AISD secondary schools (See Figure 4). The highest number of referrals to Rice H. S. were from LBJ (44), Reagan (40), or Lanier (32). Rice M.S. students were most likely to come from Pearce (59), Mendez (36), or Burnet (35). See Attachment 1, page 3 for further details.

FIGURE 4
School Referral Rates to Rice

School	Enrollment	Number Sent to Rice	Percent
Pearce	845	63	7.46
Porter	1027	58	5.65
Bedichek	1032	45	4.36
LBJ	1329	44	3.31
Reagan	1437	40	2.78
Mendez	1076	39	3.62
Murchison	971	35	3.60
Burnet	1002	35	3.49
Lanier	1547	32	2.07
Martin	794	31	3.90
Crockett	2583	30	1.16
Fulmore	894	30	3.36
O'Henry	694	30	4.32
Lamar	858	29	3.38
Kealing	872	26	2.98
Covington	1204	19	1.58
Johnston	1877	18	0.96
Anderson	1644	13	0.79
Dobie	840	9	1.07
Austin	1595	8	0.50
McCallum	1281	4	0.31
Robbins	144	3	2.08

TEAMS

As one measure of academic performance, the last TEAMS test taken was checked for each student enrolled at Rice during 1987-88. There were 18 students in fall, 1987 and 13 students in spring, 1987 eligible to take Exit Level TEAMS. Ten (55.6%) of the fall students achieved mastery and 10 (76.9%) of the spring students achieved mastery.

Overall, 14.4% of the fall, 1987 students and 14.2% of the spring, 1987 students passed all three TEAMS tests. However, 46.1% of the fall students and 46.7% of the spring, 1987 students did not pass any of the tests. Thus, remediation of TEAMS skills missed must be a priority at Rice. Inability to handle these basic skills may contribute to high subsequent dropout rates.

STAFF CONCERNS ABOUT FACILITIES AND STAFF

Formal interviews with administrative staff, project specialists and informal interviews with other school staff at Rice Secondary School indicated concern about the split campus. Administrative staff and teachers felt that personnel and materials were stretched thin with two locations. The library facilities at Rice M. S., for example, consisted of a few sets of encyclopedia and a few other books.

The location of Rice M.S. on the former Read campus presented problems. The design of the building made monitoring student behavior very difficult. There were doors that did not lock, moveable partitions for classroom walls, access from each room to the outside, access to multiple rooms from many classrooms, and walls which jut out and provide many areas in which to hide. The Read campus is located near a large shopping mall which proved too tempting for many of these students who already have problems with school attendance. It has been proposed that Rice be housed only at the Rice H.S. location next year, a facility more appropriate for these students.

The use of many permanent substitute teachers is a concern for many staff members. At the end of the year Rice M.S. full-time teaching staff was 42% permanent substitute, while Rice H.S. full-time teaching staff was 36% permanent substitute. The perception of the staff is that these substitute teachers lack training in dealing with these students, and consequently have many more discipline referrals, and provide more "babysitting" than actual teaching. Frequently, a class will "go through" several substitute teachers before finding one who can handle the students and is willing to return on a regular basis.

The late implementation of the split campus and reassignment of the principal were likely causes that less inservice training was provided this year than in the past. Staff members requested more training in the future and requested that the permanent substitute teachers hired during the year be given more training in dealing with these students.

There is concern that with the increasing numbers of students referred to Rice, it is harder to give individual students the time and attention needed. Further, many staff express concern about what happens to the students when they leave Rice. There is a perception that many students flounder when returned to their home campus. There seems to be a need for more home school follow-up support.

WHAT SERVICES DID SCGC PROVIDE AT THESE CAMPUSES IN 1987-88?

Two project specialists were assigned to F.R. Rice Secondary School, one at the high school campus and one at the middle school campus. The third project specialist served the youth at Gardner House, the Travis County Juvenile Detention Center.

SCGC also provided funds for seven part-time specialists to work during the summer of 1988. Six were assigned to the summer school campuses (Fulmore Junior High and Travis High School) and one to Gardner House. Services provided for summer school consisted mainly of calls to parents of students with absences or excessive tardies, although counseling, tutoring, and monitoring were also offered. The Gardner House specialist continued with an instructional program much the same as the one conducted throughout the 1987-88 school year.

RICE

The two project specialists assigned to F.R. Rice Secondary School (one at the high school campus and one at the middle school campus), met with all students and their parents or guardians to enroll simultaneously in the school **and** SCGC. As one result of the split campus there was only one project specialist and no regular counselor at Rice H.S. Consequently, the project specialist at Rice H.S. functioned more as a regular counselor and less as a project specialist. There was a regular counselor and a project specialist at Rice M.S. Thus, the project specialist at Rice M.S. was able to implement more of the functions of a project specialist.

In addition to liaison and referral services, the project specialists also offered counseling, tutoring, and monitoring. The objectives of the SCGC program focused on these four goals:

- Increased school attendance,
- Improved academic achievement,
- Decreased disruptive behaviors, and
- Reduced contacts with court authorities.

The supervisor of SCGC (who was also the principal at Rice) agreed with the specialists that their most important duty was to counsel with individuals. The project specialists also played the role of liaisons between students and school administrators, teachers, juvenile court officials, and social service agencies. Many of their activities

benefitted both students and staff at Rice. For example, the project specialists:

- Attended and participated in the school's Referral, Recommendation, and Review committee meetings to give background information and brainstorm techniques for dealing with specific students;
- Provided speakers for the weekly assemblies;
- Organized a system of behavior, attendance, and academic awards;
- Supervised during lunch and breaks;
- Made daily attendance calls; and
- Offered support and professional expertise to teachers.

Project specialists interacted with the parents and guardians of SCGC students in several different ways, including the following:

- As a step in the enrollment process at Rice, students and their parents and guardians met with the project specialists to discuss the school's rules, procedures, and philosophy.
- Any time a student missed school, the specialists called home to find out the reason and to emphasize the importance of regular attendance.

The project specialists had frequent, regular contacts with probation and parole officers, lawyers, social workers, and other court officials.

OTHER SOURCES EMPLOYED

Project specialists frequently referred students to community agencies for additional help or support. In spite of serving fewer students this year, the project specialists referred more students to more agencies than last year. This year they referred 274 students which is 119% more than the 125 of last year. This year they referred to 31 agencies compared with 21 agencies last year. The sources utilized are listed in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5
Agencies Utilized by SCGC

Austin Area Urban League
Austin Child Guidance and Evaluation Center
Austin Community College
Austin Dental Clinic
Austin Police Department-Victim Services
Austin State Hospital
Caritas
C.E.D.E.N.-Center for the Development of Education and Nutrition
Center for Battered Women
Charter Lane Hospital
Child and Family Services
Christian Social Mission
Creative Rapid Learning Center
Delinquency Prevention Division-Juvenile Court System
Department of Human Services-Children's Protective Services
Faulkner Center
Gary Job Corps
Huston-Tillotson College
Mental Health-Mental Retardation
Pebble Project-Child Abuse Center
Planned Parenthood of Austin
Rape Crisis Center
Reproductive Services
S.E.R.-Jobs for Progress
South Austin Youth Services
Spectrum Emergency Shelter
STARR '88
St. Edward's Job Fair
Travis County Health Department
Youth Advocacy Program
Youth Employment Services

INSERVICE TRAINING

As a result of the late funding of the TEA grant, the project specialists received no inservice training at the beginning of the school year. The project specialists also reported receiving no inservice training during the year. The fact that the school administrator was assigned to the campus just before school started and spent time on both campuses probably was a contributing factor. The project specialists would like to receive inservice training on the following topics:

- Crisis intervention,
- Conflict resolution,
- Services available in Austin,
- Addictive disorders,
- Conduct disorder and emotional disturbance,
- Individualizing of instruction,
- Stress reduction, and
- Awareness of cultural differences.

COSTS

SCGC was funded by a grant from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) under the authority of Article III, House Bill 20, Appropriations Bill of the 70th Texas Legislature. The budget of $100,000 for the 1987-88 school year was divided into $26,987 for Gardner House, $40,250 for Rice, $11,559 for evaluation and $21,294 for summer school. The number of students served in summer school is not yet available.

Gardner House served a large number of students (501) for a short period of time (average 5.9 days) while Rice's 411 students generally stayed until the end of the semester of enrollment. The cost was $54 per student for Gardner House and $98 per student for Rice. (NOTE: These figures do not reflect the number of students served during summer school in 1988.)

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE 1987-88 SCGC STUDENTS?

LOCATION AND GRADE

SCGC served 411 students at F.R. Rice Secondary School. This included the 318 at Rice H.S.and 93 who were enrolled at Rice M.S.

FIGURE 6
Frequency By Grade

Grade	Rice H.S. N=318	Rice M.S. N=93
4		
5		
6		15 (16.1%)
7	10 (3.1%)	40 (43.0%)
8	87 (27.4%)	38 (40.9%)
9	147 (46..2%)	
10	43 (13.5%)	
11	21 (6.6%)	
12	10 (3.1%)	

GENDER

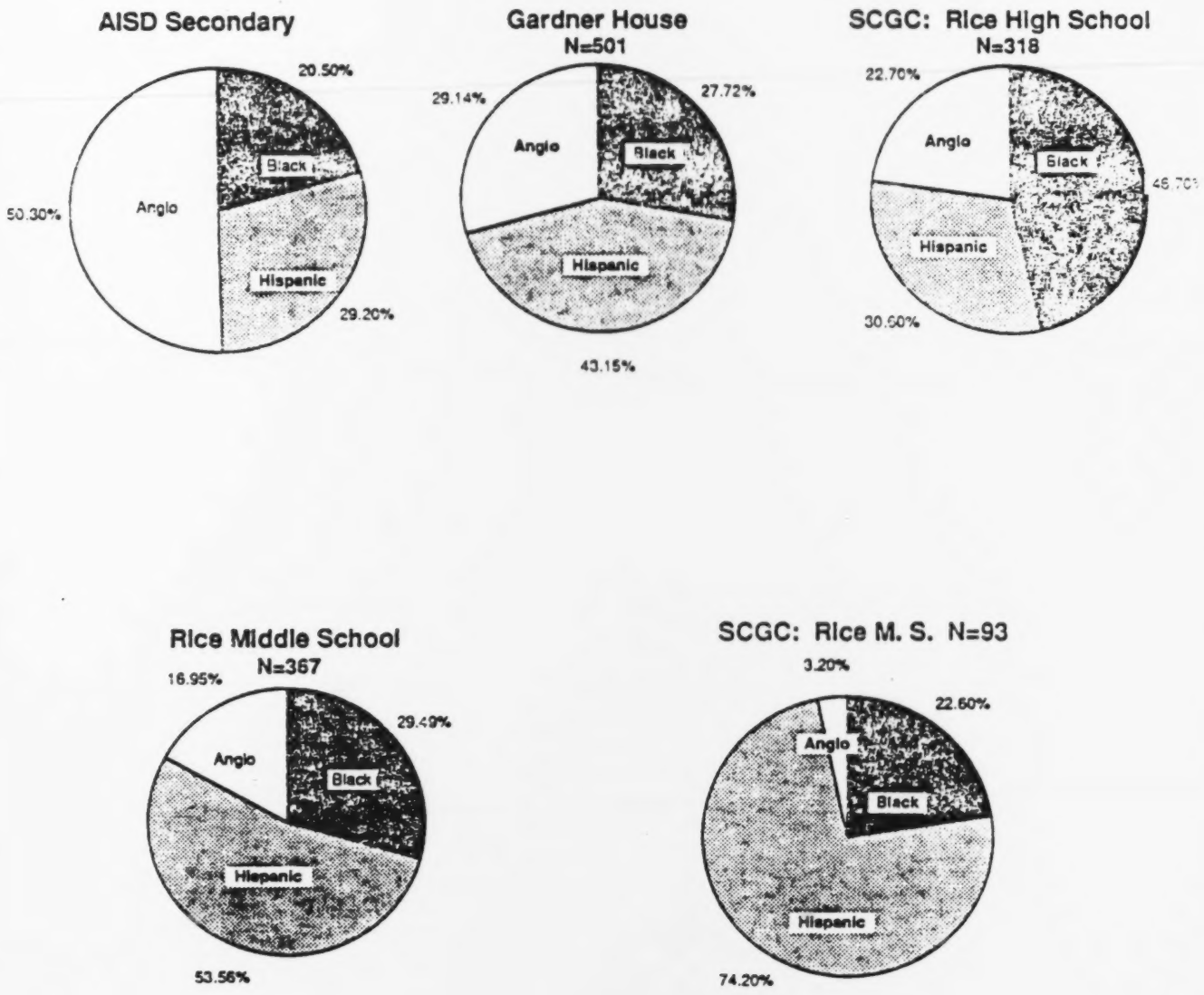
Males outnumbered females on both campuses. Overall, there were 291 (70.8%) males and 120 (29.2%) females served by SCGC.

	Rice H.S.	Rice M.S.
Male	220 (69.2%)	71 (76.3%)
Female	98 (30.8%)	22 (23.7%)
Total	318 (77.4%)	93 (22.6%)

ETHNIC BREAKDOWN

Figure 7 shows the breakdown of the three major ethnic groups served by SCGC. For comparison, the ethnic breakdown of AISD secondary students and Rice M. S. is also shown. All students at Rice H. S. were served by SCGC. Black students were overrepresented at Rice H.S. and Hispanic students were overrepresented at Rice M.S. Rice served no American Indians, Alaskan natives, Asians nor Pacific Islanders.

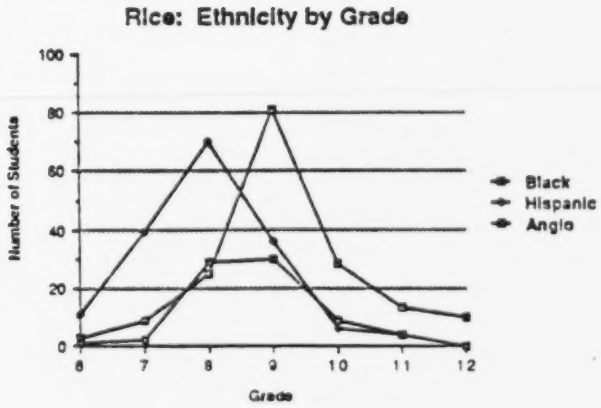
FIGURE 7
Ethnicity



ETHNIC BREAKDOWN BY GRADE

Overall Hispanics represented the largest group of students in SCGC. However, there was a difference in ethnic groups by grade. Hispanics contributed the most to the eighth grade and declined rapidly thereafter, while Blacks and Anglos peaked in the ninth grade. The breakdown of ethnicity by grade is shown in Figure 8 (Rice).

FIGURE 8
RICE



Rice: Ethnicity by Grade

Ethnicity	Grade 6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Black	3	9	25	81	28	13	10
Hispanic	11	39	70	36	6	4	0
Anglo	1	2	29	30	9	4	0

LENGTH OF PARTICIPATION IN SCGC

Students enrolled in SCGC at Rice stayed until the end of that semester. This meant that some remained for 18 weeks and others for only a few days.

REFERRAL REASONS

Students were referred to SCGC because they had committed one or more of a wide variety of offenses. Many of these offenses were not committed in school; however, the District's interest in the students goes beyond school hours and includes their overall ability to function in society and their growth as individuals. SCGC was designed to help teenagers avoid adjudication, which meant the delinquent behaviors leading to criminal prosecution had to be addressed.

Figure 9 shows the frequencies of these offenses for students enrolled at Rice; insubordination and fighting were the most common. Some of the juveniles were referred for more than one reason.

FIGURE 9
Offenses by Frequency for SCGC Students Enrolled at Rice 1987-88

Offense	Frequency	Rice H.S.	Rice M.S.
Insubordination	102	61 (11.7%)	41 (23.2%)
Fighting	101	66 (12.6%)	35 (19.8%)
Unexcused absences	78	73 (13.9%)	5 (2.8%)
Truancy	77	68 (13.0%)	9 (5.1%)
Excessive tardiness	65	50 (9.6%)	15 (8.5%)
Obscene language	55	34 (6.5%)	21 (11.9%)
Detention, missed or excessive	52	44 (8.4%)	8 (4.5%)
Assault	49	37 (7.1%)	12 (6.8%)
Violation of drug abuse policy	34	25 (4.8%)	9 (5.1%)
Theft	31	22 (4.2%)	9 (5.1%)
Possession of weapons	14	8 (1.5%)	6 (3.3%)
Vandalism	8	7 (1.3%)	1 (0.6%)
Arson	5	4 (0.8%)	1 (0.6%)
*Other	28	24 (4.6%)	4 (2.2%)

* "Other" includes four counts of extortion, four counts of parental request, three counts of student request, two counts of adjustment and one count of each of these: possession of fireworks, distributing Nazi signs to others on campus, excessive absences but goes to other campuses, forgery, gang related fights, harassment and fondling of female student, indecency with a child, living in halfway house for TYC, loitering on campus, no skills for handling conflicts, runaway, self-injury with knives, sexual advance towards female teacher, special assignment, threatening to "burn the place down", and verbalized suicide intent in addition to truancy.

WHAT HAPPENED TO STUDENTS WHEN THEY LEFT RICE?

BY THE END OF THE SEMESTER AT RICE

Students enrolled at Rice generally stayed until the end of that semester. A few transferred, were expelled, or dropped out. Figure 10 displays the outcome for spring, 1987 SCGC students and all 1987-88 students enrolled at Rice.

FIGURE 10
Disposition at the End of the Semester

	Spring, 1987	Fall, 1987	Spring, 1988
In School			
Returned to Home School	209 (82.0%)	211 (68.7%)	334 (90.0%)
Remained at Rice	8 (3.1%)	55 (17.9%)	16 (4.2%)
Dropped out	15 (6.0%)	15 (4.9%)	11 (3.0%)
Transferred out of AISD	3 (1.2%)	5 (1.6%)	2 (0.5%)
Expelled	20 (7.8%)	21 (6.8%)	9 (2.4%)
Total	255	307	372

TWELVE-WEEK FOLLOW-UP STATUS

A follow-up study was conducted on all SCGC students who exited Rice spring, 1987 and all Rice students who exited fall, 1987. See Figure 11 for their status at the twelfth week of the semester following their attendance at Rice. Dropouts did not attend at any time during the semester. Partial attendees attended part of the semester but dropped out by the twelfth week. Note that the dropout rate is higher from the home school than it was during the semester at Rice. Only slightly more than half were attending their home school after 12 weeks.

FIGURE 11
Twelve Week Follow-up Status

	Spring, 1987	Fall, 1987
In School		
Attending Home School	145 (56.9%)	181 (59.0%)
Returned to Rice	24 (9.4%)	21 (6.8%)
Dropped Out		
Dropped Out (Did not attend at all.)	40 (15.7%)	46 (15.0%)
Partial Attendance at Home School	20 (7.8%)	33 (10.7%)
Partial Attendance at Rice		2 (0.7%)
Transferred	25 (9.8%)	22 (7.2%)
Expelled	1 (0.4%)	2 (0.7%)
Total	255	307

TWELVE-WEEK FOLLOW-UP - ATTENDANCE FOR SCGC STUDENTS

Attendance data were collected on 106 students who enrolled in SCGC during the spring, 1987 semester and 55 students who enrolled in SCGC during the fall, 1987 semester and who:

- Were eligible to return to their home school at the end of the semester; and
- Were still in school twelve weeks later.

These were the requirements for the TEA report (see Bibliography). Figure 12 reflects the attendance status at the twelfth week after returning to home schools. The change of schools at midyear may have a more deleterious effect on students than a change in fall. Note that students who exited Rice in the spring and returned to their home school in the fall were more likely to have improved attendance rates, while those who exited Rice in the fall semester and returned to their home school in the spring were more likely to have decreased attendance rates.

FIGURE 12
Changes in Attendance Rates

Spring, 1987 N=106

Improved	Decreased	No Change
55 (51.9%)	32 (30.2%)	19 (17.9%)

Fall, 1987 N=55

Improved	Decreased	No Change
14 (25.5%)	28 (50.9%)	13 (23.6%)

TWELVE-WEEK FOLLOW-UP - GRADES FOR SCGC STUDENTS

The grades for the same 161 students mentioned previously were examined. Complete grade information was available for both semesters for only 71 students. AISD high school students need 21 credits for general graduation. Completing 2.5 credits (five courses per semester) most semesters will result in attainment of that goal. Therefore, 2.5 credits per semester (or five courses per semester) was used as the stardard for satisfactory progress. The figure below displays their grade status during and after enrollment at Rice. At Rice more students enrolled in the spring semester passed five or more courses than those enrolled in the fall semester. Overall, students passed more courses while at Rice than after leaving Rice. This may reflect the differences in the structure of the alternative school and the regular school. Classes at Rice are smaller, individualized, and self-paced. Serious problems with records exist which need to be investigated.

Spring, 1987 N=42	During Rice	After Rice
Passing 5 or more courses	30 (71.4%)	13 (31.0%)
Passing fewer than 5 courses	12 (28.6%)	29 (69.0%)

Fall, 1987 N=29	During Rice	After Rice
Passing 5 or more courses	15 (51.7%)	8 (27.6%)
Passing fewer than 5 courses	14 (48.3%)	21 (72.4%)

ATTENDANCE RATES FOR ALL RICE STUDENTS

Additional attendance data were collected on all SCGC students enrolled in spring, 1987 and all Rice students enrolled in fall, 1987. **The attendance rate while at Rice was slightly lower than before entry for each group, but the largest decline in the attendance rate occurred well before their enrollment in SCGC.** The range of absences in the semester prior to attending in spring, 1987 was 0-29. The average number of absences was 4.5. The range of absences prior to attending in the fall of 1987 was 0-37. The average number of absences was 4.9. Seventy-three percent of the spring, 1987 students and 25% of fall, 1987 students **entering** Rice had **already exceeded** five absences for the semester. While it was not determined whether absences were excused or not, many students probably were close to or had exceeded the limit. This may help to explain why attendance declined. New attendance rules prevent students from receiving credit after five **unexcused** absences.

The attendance rate increased for both groups of spring, 1987 students (all students and those meeting TEA requirements) **after leaving SCGC.** However, it decreased for both groups of fall, 1987 students after leaving Rice. This decrease may reflect a change in schools at midyear or may reflect that all Rice students and not just SCGC students are included in fall, 1987. See Figures 13a and 13b for attendance rates for students who exited from Rice.

FIGURE 13a

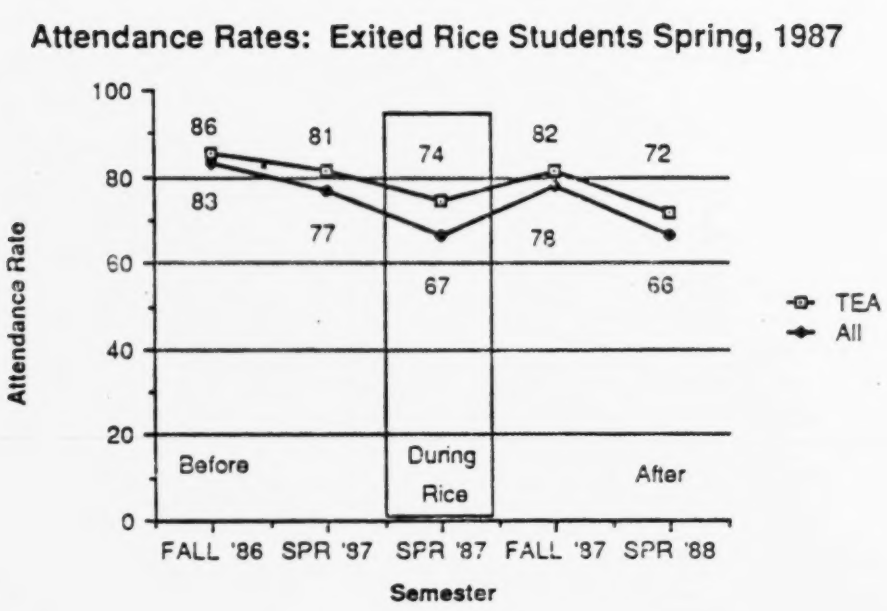
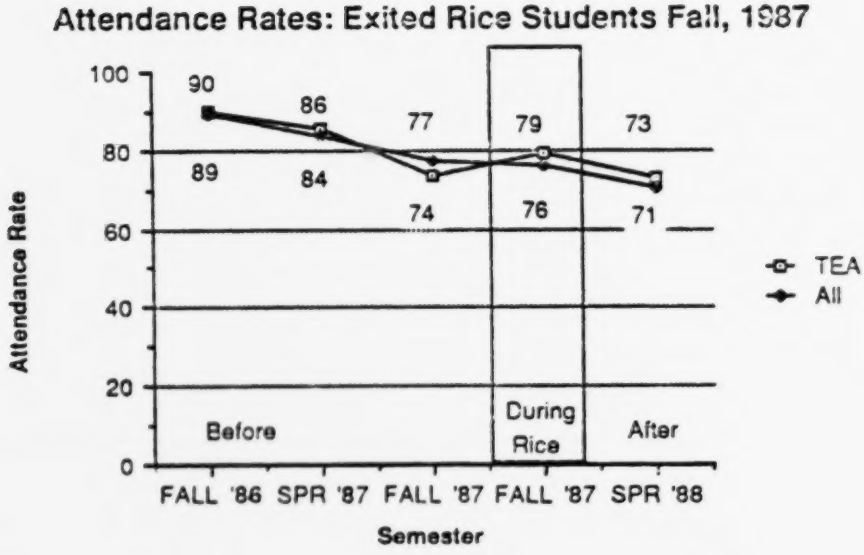


FIGURE 13b



DROPOUT STUDY

DISPOSITIONS

Data was gathered on the 1,284 SCGC students enrolled at Rice from spring, 1986 through spring, 1987 and all students enrolled at Rice in 1987-88. Only 4.3% had dropped out during the semester of enrollment at Rice. Eighty percent were returned to their home school and 10% spanned (were detained at Rice for the following semester). See Figure 14.

FIGURE 14
Dispositions of Students for Five Semesters
At Time of Departure From Rice
N=1,284

Graduated	3	(0.2%)
In School		
In Home School	1031	(80.3%)
Spanned at Rice	130	(10.1%)
Dropped Out	55	(4.3%)
Transferred	12	(0.9%)
Expelled	53	(4.1%)

DROPOUT RATES

All students assigned to Rice are at high risk for dropping out of school. If a student has withdrawn from school and a transfer request from another institution has not been received, then AISD considers the student a dropout. A follow-up study on dropping out was conducted on all students enrolled in Rice during the four semesters prior to spring, 1988. The enrollment status was checked at several points in time. See Figures 15, 16, 17, and 18.

FIGURE 15
Follow-up of Former Students
Who Exited Rice in Spring, 1986
N=188

	Status as of: November, 1986	January, 1987	June, 1987	January, 1988	June, 1988
Graduated	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)
In School					
In School	148 (74.7%)	63 (31.8%)	56 (28.3%)	50 (25.3%)	29 (14.6%)
Returned to Rice	12 (6.1%)	46 (23.2%)	30 (15.2%)	12 (6.1%)	10 (5.1%)
Dropped Out					
Dropped Out	25 (17.6%)	37 (18.7%)	69 (34.8%)	85 (42.9%)	114 (57.6%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Home School		43 (21.7%)	29 (14.6%)	32 (16.2%)	24 (12.1%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Rice		1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)		1 (0.5%)
Transferred	2 (1.0%)	7 (3.5%)	7 (3.5%)	17 (8.6%)	18 (9.1%)
Deceased			1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)	1 (0.5%)
Expelled			4 (2.0%)		

FIGURE 16
Follow-up of Former Students
Who Exited Rice in Fall, 1986
N=146

	Status as of: April, 1987	June, 1987	January, 1988	June, 1988
Graduated				
In School				
In School	82 (56.2%)	98 (67.1%)	58 (39.7%)	44 (30.1%)
Returned to Rice	27 (18.5%)	3 (2.1%)	20 (13.7%)	9 (6.2%)
Dropped Out				
Dropped Out	25 (17.1%)	36 (24.7%)	27 (18.5%)	54 (37.0%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Home School			29 (19.9%)	22 (15.1%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Rice			1 (0.7%)	5 (3.4%)
Transferred	3 (2.1%)	9 (6.2%)	11 (7.5%)	12 (8.2%)
Expelled	9 (6.2%)			

FIGURE 17
Follow-up of Former Students
Who Exited Rice in Spring, 1987
N=255

	Status as of: November, 1987	January, 1988	June, 1988
Graduated			
In School			
In School	145 (56.9%)	143 (56.1%)	92 (36.1%)
Returned to Rice	24 (9.4%)	28 (11.0%)	33 (12.9%)
Dropped Out			
Dropped Out	40 (15.7%)	34 (13.3%)	51 (20.0%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Home School	20 (7.8%)	24 (9.4%)	44 (17.3%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Rice			11 (4.3%)
Transferred	25 (9.8%)	23 (9.0%)	24 (9.4%)
Expelled	1 (0.4%)	3 (1.2%)	

FIGURE 18
Follow-up of Former Students
Who Exited Rice in Fall, 1987
N=307

	Status as of: April, 1988	June, 1988
Graduated		4 (1.3%)
In School		
In School	181 (59.0%)	161 (52.4%)
Returned to Rice	21 (6.8%)	31 (10.1%)
Dropped Out		
Dropped Out	46 (15.0%)	45 (14.6%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Home School	33 (10.7)	37 (12.1%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out of Rice	2 (0.7%)	4 (1.3%)
Transferred	22 (7.2%)	24 (7.8%)
Expelled	2 (0.7%)	1 (0.3%)

While at Rice few students appeared to drop out. However, rates escalated once students returned to their home school. Almost one half of these students had dropped out one year after leaving Rice. Some of these students may have been enrolled in educational programs which did not grant a high school diploma. Of special interest is the number of students who exhibit partial attendance before dropping out. Many students attended parts of two or more semesters before completely dropping out.

Results of the spring, 1988 Employee Survey indicated that, if services were provided, home schools were most likely to provide returning students with a special orientation, extra individual counseling, unique course assignment, and a tour of the school. Schools were not likely to provide students with an adult mentor and were less likely to provide group counseling.

Students having repeat referrals to Rice were more likely to be in school one and one-half to two years later than students not enrolled again at Rice. This relationship is statistically significant at p .00001. It appears that many students who function well at Rice are unable to function well at their home school. They either drop out or return to Rice. See Figure 19. Stronger support services for Rice students returning to their home school seem to be needed.

FIGURE 19
Relationship Between Repeat Referral and School Status

	In School	Not In School
One and Half Years After Leaving Rice		
No Repeat Referral	43 (37.4%)	130 (65.7%)
Repeat Referral	72 (62.6%)	68 (34.3%)
Two Years After Leaving Rice		
No Repeat Referral	15 (38.5%)	98 (70.5%)
Repeat Referral	24 (61.5%)	41 (29.5%)

SPANNERS

Spanners are students who enrolled at Rice one semester and remained at Rice for the following semester. A study was conducted of all SCGC students enrolled at Rice for the semesters spring, 1986 through spring, 1987 and all Rice students enrolled in 1987-88 who were spanned to the following semester. It was found that students retained at Rice do not drop out at rates as high as students returned to home campuses at the end of the semester enrolled. See Figure 20.

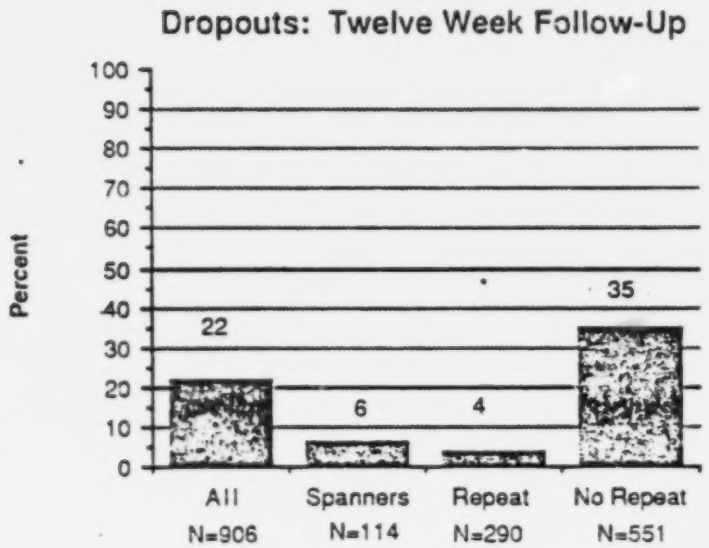
FIGURE 20
Follow-up of Spanners

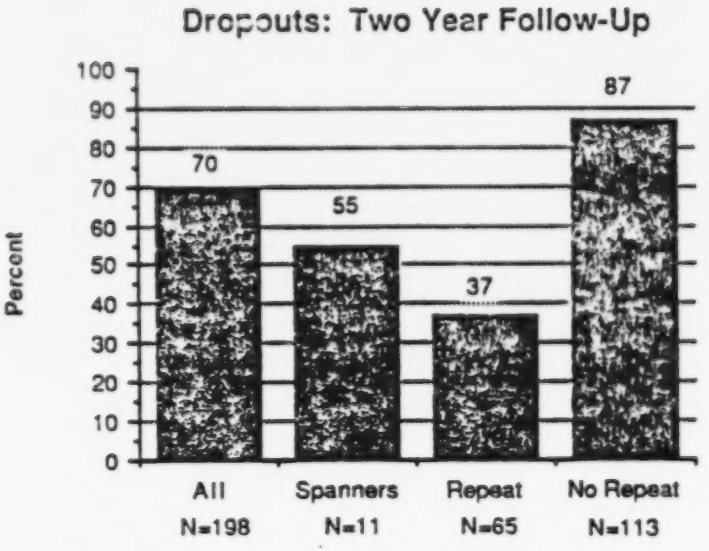
	Time 1*	Time 2*	Time 3*	Time 4*	Time 5*
Graduated		1 (0.9%)			
In School					
In School	97 (85.1%)	83 (72.8%)	28 (47.5%)	20 (39.2%)	1 (9.1%)
Returned to Rice		11 (9.6%)	8 (13.6%)	3 (5.9%)	2 (18.2%)
Dropped Out					
Dropped Out	5 (4.4%)	10 (8.8%)	6 (10.2%)	14 (27.5%)	3 (27.3%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out Of Home School	1 (0.9%)		10 (16.9%)	9 (17.6%)	3 (27.3%)
Partial Attendance Before Dropping Out Of Rice	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.8%)	1 (1.7%)		
Transferred	3 (2.6%)	6 (5.3%)	5 (8.5%)	5 (9.8%)	2 (18.2%)
Expelled	7 (6.2%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (1.7%)		
	N=114	N=114	N=59	N=51	N=11

* Time 1 - Twelfth week of semester following enrollment in Rice.
Time 2 - End of the first semester after enrollment in Rice.
Time 3 - End of the second semester after enrollment in Rice.
Time 4 - End of the third semester after enrollment in Rice.
Time 5 - End of the fourth semester after enrollment in Rice.

Follow-up information was available on 906 students enrolled at any time from January 1986 through January 1988. Dropout rates were compared for all 906 students, the spanners (students enrolled during one semester and remaining at Rice for the following semester), students with a repeat referral to Rice and students with no repeat referral to Rice. Figure 21 displays the results at twelve weeks and two years after leaving Rice. Those with no repeat referral had the highest dropout rate and those with a repeat referral had the lowest dropout rate at both points in time.

FIGURE 21
Dropouts: Comparison of Rates





DISCUSSION

The students who are served by SCGC represent a population at very high risk for dropping out. The students have already been labeled incorrigible for the most part (except those referred for academic problems to TAP and AIP). Results suggest some areas that SCGC staff can be proud of as well as some challenges for the future. Possible solutions came to mind as we worked with SCGC and Rice staff and analyzed data throughout the year. Readers are invited to view suggestions as "mind teasers" for their consideration.

RICE

Rice represents an attempt to provide a full educational experience for students who have been unsuccessful in fitting into a regular school environment. Staff attempt to help these students: increase school attendance, improve academic achievement, decrease disruptive behavior, and reduce contacts with court authorities. While at Rice students do tend to stay in school and earn credits towards graduation.

Dropout rates deserve elaboration, as there is national attention to finding appropriate ways to help high-risk students. Very few students dropped out while enrolled at Rice (4.3% of 1,284 during last five semesters). However, rates escalated once students returned to their home schools (22% had dropped out by the twelfth week; 70% had dropped out within 2 years of leaving Rice). (Dropout rates for TAP participants are reported to be a lower 23.7% after one year based on the retention alternatives report--ORE Pub. No. 87.52). It appears that a longer stay at Rice might be effective in lowering dropout rates somewhat. Those students who had a repeat referral to Rice or were enrolled during one semester and remained for the next semester were more likely to remain in school and had the lowest dropout rates.

A contributing factor to high dropout rates is likely to be the fact that students show less ability to pass courses after returning to home schools, with only 28% passing five or more courses.

Improvements both in the program at Rice and at the home schools once students return could help to improve effectiveness. The Rice program might be more effective if:

- Students stayed there longer, the fall to spring change in schools was eliminated, and more flexibility was allowed in exit dates.
- Students learned more life-coping skills in classes or group counseling to aid in elimination of the attendance, academic, and behavior problems which brought them to Rice initially.
- A stronger TEAMS focus was incorporated, with materials packets available for substitutes and other teachers to use on various objectives.

- There was one campus so staff were not stretched thin over two locations.
- Fewer substitute and more regular teachers were employed. At the end of the year Rice teaching staff was 39% permanent substitutes. Hiring more regular teachers could result in better instruction and fewer discipline referrals.
- Some teachers were hired on a half-time basis and expanded to full time as enrollment increased.
- More resources were allocated for Rice. There need to be teachers' manuals and library resources adequate for the projected enrollment.
- Project specialists had more planning time before the school year and at least one break away from students during the day.
- Home schools sent information about the students they refer on a more timely basis.

REGULAR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Many students leaving Rice do not do well upon their return to their home campus. They either return to Rice or drop out. One factor might be that the school changes necessitated by enrollment in Rice and the return to the home school are too much for these students, who are already experiencing difficulty in school. Moving to a new school or even returning to a school midyear when other students have adjusted and made friends may be more difficult than in the fall when everyone gets a chance to start fresh. Some national research suggest high-risk students do not cope well with change, have limited life-coping skills, and have a low sense of personal responsibility (O'Sullivan, 1988).

Another factor may be the match of the nature of the students and the school environment involved. Classes at Rice are small, instruction is individualized, and total enrollment at Rice is smaller than at the regular high schools.

Unless an alternative school is developed for these students, they will return at some point to their home school. Some schools do provide former SCGC students with some services, but the support provided appears to be inconsistent from school to school and insufficient overall. Better follow-up is needed on the home campus with these high-maintenance students (probably need long-term support). Some ideas include:

- School within a school concept to enhance identity and a sense of belonging.
- Scheduling students into smaller class sections as available.
- Support group or group counseling.
- Life-coping skills class.
- Greater use of an adult mentor.
- Greater use of the Peer Assistance Leadership (PAL) program.

CONCLUSION

The question asked in the title "High-Risk Students--Can You Keep Them In School?" would seem to have two answers. The answer to the question depends on the length of the time period in question.

Over a short time period, such as the duration of assignment to Rice, the answer seems to be "Yes." Yes, you can keep these students in school. In spite of problems such as design of the building, location of the building, large use of substitute teachers, decreased inservice training, increasing enrollment, and last year's problems with a split campus, students stay enrolled while at Rice. Of the 1,284 SCGC students enrolled at Rice from spring, 1986 through spring, 1987, and all students enrolled at Rice in 1987-88, only 4.3% had dropped out during their semester of enrollment at Rice.

Over a longer time period, such as one and a half to two years after enrollemnt in the alternative program, the answer seems to be "No." The one semester intervention did not seem to have lasting effect on enrollment. Once these students returned to their home schools, the drop-out rate escalated. Almost one-half of these students had dropped out one year after leaving Rice.

Further research is indicated to determine whether these students can function in their home school with additional support or whether these students need the structure, individualized learning, and additional counseling provided by the alternative program in order to attain graduation.

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